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Czech Republic

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## Editorial

With this issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* we recognise the quality of work being produced by IBTS graduates. One of the reasons for the production of this Journal is to provide opportunities for emerging young scholars in the EBF to publish their research and reflections. We have sought to do this throughout the history of the publication, but never before have we devoted a whole issue to the work of alumni and graduates of IBTS. In this issue we have three excellent examples of the reflective research work going on amongst our student, graduate and post-graduate community, which at present numbers 140 people.

Linas Andronovas, a young theologian from Lithuania, examines a key question about the nature of holiness, as perceived in the Bible, and the way it has been approached amongst baptistic communities in eastern Europe.

Magda Maria Pap explores important issues of family and social cohesion within the Hungarian speaking Baptists of Romania. Her work in social ministry has received wider acknowledgement by the support of the *Global Women* organisation in the USA.

Vanessa Lake, a missionary serving in Slovakia, helps us in our spiritual journey by exploring the reality of the experience of that great hymn writer William Cowper (1731 – 1800). Here is a reminder of the ‘vale of soul-making’ which is a recurrent theme of our spiritual journey from John Bunyan onwards. To read the life of Cowper is to understand better the passion and spirituality of his hymns. One of his most famous has a final verse which is an encouragement to us all –

Though vine nor fig-tree neither  
Their wonted fruit should bear,  
Though all the fields should wither,  
Nor flocks, nor herds be there,  
Yet, God the same abiding,  
His praise shall tune my voice,  
For, while in Him confiding,  
I cannot but rejoice.

**The Revd Keith G Jones**  
Rector, IBTS

# Holiness as Practices: The Witnessing Community in Contemporary Society

## 1 Introduction

“For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth.” (Leviticus 11:44 (NRSV))

Baptistic<sup>1</sup> communities in Eastern Europe are often preoccupied with the issue of holiness. One of the key concerns of such communities is how to keep their members morally undefiled by abstaining from any involvement in society. They adopt some kind of ‘trench’ mentality and cluster themselves within ‘churchly things’ alone. This preoccupation with holiness has been expressed in the formulation of a certain canon of ethical expectations for a person to become or remain a part of the community.

This requirement ‘to be holy’ has even become some kind of a prerequisite for being a Christian. I see this requirement of ‘not being defiled’ as actually replacing true discipleship and sanctification as a form of life in the baptistic community with legalistic observance of abstract, apparently ‘foundational’ principles and moral norms.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the aim of this paper is to look at the nature and implications of the ‘holiness requirement’ in baptistic churches as a misperceived understanding of discipleship and also a stumbling block for the church’s witness to the world.

The paper will be presented in four parts. First, I will try to show the biblical-historical understanding of the concept of holiness. Second, I will present the idea of a ‘baptist vision’ as found in the works of three theologians of baptistic roots, John Howard Yoder, James Wm. McClendon and Glen H. Stassen. Third, I will try to show that this vision is grounded in active engagement in transforming society and how the formation of a ‘holiness requirement’ hinders this mission. Finally, I will propose an alternative understanding of holiness, not as a requirement for entrance into

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<sup>1</sup> Baptistic churches represent Christian groups that are distinct from ‘sacramental’ and mainstream ‘protestant’ and linked by a formative sub-set of the five distinctive features. Some of those could be different Baptist, Pentecostal, Free Evangelical, Mennonite, and other groups. See James Wm.

McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), vol. I, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Consider a recent statement of one of the church leaders in Eastern Europe [translation mine – L.A.], “In Soviet times the major principle of a Christian family was keeping the moral norms.” Voldemar Corn, ‘Interview with Jurij Shelestun’, *Vera I Zhiznj* 1(2002), p. 20.

the church but as a way of gradual transformation as found in the Sermon on the Mount.

## 2 Holiness

Before setting out to explain the ‘baptist vision’, it is necessary to do a short amount of etymological research and try to understand something of the root meaning of the concept of holiness in the Bible. Here is a short sketch of the concept of holiness as I see it. Holiness is a process. It is communal. It is ‘contagious’, for those who belong to the Holy God are also holy. It is not sectarian and should spill over the borders of the church to society at large in a transforming manner. Holiness is not a detached, a-historical contemplation of some abstract ‘goodness’ or ‘holiness’ of God. Finally, holiness, rightfully understood, is concerned not so much with what we [I am using inclusive forms to talk about the baptistic communities] should do ourselves but what we should be or how our character should be properly formed, so that a Holy God can set us aside and use us for the purposes of his kingdom. Let us now look at these elements separately.

The Hebrew word *qadosh* ('set aside') in the Hebrew Scriptures primarily refers to the holiness of YHWH. First of all it reflects the nature of the awesome, omnipotent, transcendent God of Israel, who, furthermore, in his infinite goodness, opened himself to humankind. Here is one definition:

The Holy One is a Consuming Fire which, if unleashed, could easily incinerate the universe. The Holy One is a separate entity from his creation; he exhibits a perfection humanity cannot experience and his power is formidable. At the same time, the Holy Fire turns out to be a person with a clearly defined will bent on the welfare of his people.<sup>3</sup>

This holiness of YHWH is seen not as a detached and a-historical abstraction of the infinite and transcendent power. YHWH’s holiness is exposed and perceived through his direct involvement in the history of Israel, being something tangible or **incarnate**. This incarnation was neither cheap nor without challenge for the people to whom God revealed himself. The Hebrews were elected to reflect God’s holiness on earth and this was “reinforced in concrete ways through initiation and separation rituals, such as circumcision, dietary and purity laws”. Moreover, this incarnation of

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<sup>3</sup> H. K. Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 44.

YHWH's holiness required the Hebrews to be seriously committed to "extend ethical goodness in the world. This ethics is in direct imitation of the Holy One; it is an extension of his holiness into human realm."<sup>4</sup>

In a similar way, McClendon describes *qadosh* as the holiness of God reflecting the "awe and terror or dread human beings feel in the presence of the uncanny, the awe-some, the numinous". McClendon looks at this 'incarnational holiness' as making human beings perfect in the sense of being complete.<sup>5</sup> This holistic interpretation of the *qadosh* concept is grounded in the 'complete' nature of the Holy One and not in the 'moral' part of God's character. "The Holy One is the Complete One, whole in himself, needing no other, rather extending his holiness to things and people who come near him, so that they are included in that wholeness by the divine action."<sup>6</sup>

This understanding of holiness should only be read from a communal perspective for God revealed and transmitted his holiness to the peoplehood of God's chosen people. In Hebrew Scriptures the existential dimension of a person's holiness, although present, is not emphasised. The community of God's chosen people was to serve as a moral agent to the fallen world. The New Testament equally sustains this understanding of the holiness of God's people being represented and mediated through his church and the churches. "The Biblical story focuses on God's design for forming a covenant people. Thus the primary sphere of moral concern is not the character of the individual but corporate obedience of the church".<sup>7</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg writes on the issue of 'incarnational communitarian holiness',

In the Old Testament, the love of God is expressed in his electing a people for himself and in his persevering in that act of election. This is the source and criterion of all moral obligation. Because God wants his elect people to flourish, every member of that community is required to observe the minimal conditions of the community's flourishing... [N]o human community is possible where people murder one another, steal one another's possessions,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>5</sup> A concept so eloquently taken further by the author of the Hebrews.

<sup>6</sup> Following Rudolf Otto, McClendon asserts that this Judaic idea of holiness is contrary to the modern understanding of *qadosh* as a moral/ethical idea. *Systematic Theology: Doctrine*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), vol. II, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> R. B. Hayes, 'New Testament Ethics: The Theological Task', *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1995), p. 108.

violate their marriages, dishonor their parents, or injure one another by slander.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, this holiness, properly understood, reflects the idea of progress rather than a completed status or a prerequisite needed to be a part of God's community. Therefore, "holiness is not a state of being but the power generated by the relationship between Israel and God. [I]srael is invited to participate in the divine will and is empowered by the Holy One himself. Holiness encourages God to be 'present' within the community and enhances its potentiality for ethical goodness."<sup>9</sup> The Hebraic understanding of holiness does not stress anything like a formal moral 'canon' or standard to be accepted if one is to be a part of God's people. It is much more than that. The "emphasis is not on holy transformation but on the responsibility of the already holy people [by birth into Israel – L.A.] to maintain their sanctification as the elect by daily fulfilment of the divine commands."<sup>10</sup>

It is obvious that the understanding of biblical holiness in Eastern European baptistic churches is far different from the roots of this concept. The 'holiness requirement' has become a prerequisite for being a part of the church. It is often expressed as a set of rules of a basic behavioural nature intended somehow to match the holiness of the Holy One. Biblically and historically, by contrast, the concept of *qadosh* meant a 'contagious' holiness of YHWH which was incarnated in the life and, necessarily, the witness of the Hebrew nation. Holiness was perceived as a process which enabled the people of God to live their daily lives reflecting the loving, caring, just and moral nature of the Creator. This idea is being recovered by some baptistic ethicists and theologians today and can be found expressed in what is called the 'baptist vision'.<sup>11</sup>

### 3 The Baptist Vision

Drawing upon this short inquiry into the nature of the 'holiness concept', I will now try to look into the same ideas expressed by some modern theologians. Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, in his *Body Politics*, talks about five practices of the radical churches that should be

<sup>8</sup> 'When Everything is Permitted', *First Things* 80 (February 1998), pp. 26-30, on line available, <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9802/articles/pannenberg.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Harrington, *Holiness*, p. 200.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>11</sup> Baptist vision – "A guiding stimulus by which a people (or as here, a combination of peoples) shape their life and thought as that people or that combination; I mean by it the continually emerging theme and tonic structure of their common life. The vision is thus already present, waiting to be recognized and employed." McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 27-28.

exposed to the ‘watching world’ as a witness of the transformed community of Jesus Christ. Yoder is concerned with the dichotomous view of ‘holiness’ (‘worship’ in Yoder’s terms) as a separation of the ‘churchy’ and the ‘public’, or the church and politics. In this context he argues that, “Church and world are not two compartments under separate legislation or two institutions with contradictory assignments, but two levels of the pertinence of the same Lordship.”<sup>12</sup>

Yoder considers five particular practices of daily church life. He asserts that each of these should be reflected in “social practice lived out by the early Christians, under divine mandate, which at the same time offers a paradigm for the life of the larger society”.<sup>13</sup> According to Yoder, these five practices are: (1) peacemaking and reconciliation (reflected in Jesus’ words of ‘binding and loosing’); (2) concern for economic justice (reflected in the Eucharist); (3) inclusion of all humanity in this new form of life (reflected in baptism); (4) the sharing of authority in the community in a form of mutual servanthood (reflected in the multiplicity of gifts); and (5) the practice of free and open meetings (reflected in the Pauline assessment of the church’s nature).

For Yoder, ‘holiness’ is not an abstract moralising doctrinaire concept. He sees true ‘worship’ or ‘holiness’ as “actions of God, in and with, through and under what men and women do. Where they are happening, the people of God are real in the world. [T]hey are publicly accessible behaviours, which the neighbours cannot merely notice but in fact share in, understand, and imitate.”<sup>14</sup>

In a similar way, Baptist theologian, James Wm. McClendon, considers another five practices of the ‘baptist vision’. These five practices constitute a baptistic understanding of holiness by seeing “the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community” and affirming ‘this is that and then is now’.<sup>15</sup>

Like Yoder’s five ‘body politics’, McClendon’s five practices also point towards a baptistic form of life as directly involved in the transformational activities in the world outside the local church walls. These practices are: (1) biblicism (authority of the Bible); (2) mission as

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<sup>12</sup> J. H. Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1994), p. ix.

<sup>13</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, p. x.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-3.

<sup>15</sup> In other words, the life of baptistic communities is based on the continuous and uninterrupted story of the followers of Christ that began on the day of Pentecost and will end with the return of Christ. His life, and the life of his primitive followers, is our life, their sufferings are our sufferings, and their glory will be our glory. McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 31.

responsibility to witness to Christ; (3) freedom of conscience; (4) discipleship “as life transformed into service by the lordship of Jesus Christ”; and (5) community, signified by the Lord’s Supper.<sup>16</sup> The similarity with Yoder’s five practices, not only conceptually but even in detail, is striking. They clearly reflect this initial Judaeo-Christian understanding of holiness that I have discussed in the previous section. Another Baptist theologian and ethicist Glen H. Stassen will be the last to be considered in this endeavour to show that a true ‘baptist vision’ of holiness can be embedded in the baptist form of life and needs to be reinstated to repair the damage of common Eastern European views.

Following H. Richard Niebuhr, Stassen envisions three major characteristics of the embodied holiness of God in his church. He sees the transformed community of faith reflecting God’s nature in three ‘ministerial’ aspects: prophetic/apostolic (revealed in Christ), pioneering (revealed in the Holy Spirit) and pastoral (revealed in God the Father).<sup>17</sup> As I see it, these three aspects are grounded in a holistic understanding of the triune God’s holiness. His holiness and goodness represent an obligatory extension of God’s presence into the world. His goodness enters the world in a transformative way through the witnessing community. The completeness of God’s holiness has been made ‘contagious’ and therefore involves the entire world. Let us now unpack each of these aspects.

There is probably little debate about the prophetic or apostolic nature of the church. The Great Commission sends the church of Christ into the world to proclaim the good news to all nations, winning followers and making disciples of Christ. “This is the logical implication of the historic-revelation dimension of the sovereignty of God – the presently experienced shape of God’s redemptive action in Christ, disclosing the normative pattern of God’s faithfulness.”<sup>18</sup> Thus the idea of *qadosh*, of God choosing Israel to be his nation and be his witness to the world around, receives a new impetus in the life of Christian communities as an imperative to ‘tell the world about God’ and bring people into fellowship with him.

A ‘pioneer’ aspect of the church is concerned with serving as a “faithful model for human community”. This particular aspect has always been the most difficult to follow. From business to bicycling, the church had always been called to show an alternate way of life. Yet much of the history of the church is evidence of a failure to do this. Instead there has

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> G. H. Stassen, ‘A New Vision’ in G. H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager & J. H. Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 225.

<sup>18</sup> G. H. Stassen, ‘A New Vision’, p. 226.

been the communication of the abstract or bodiless understanding of holiness in the church. Crusades, Christian religious wars, including the last two world wars, slavery and segregation are only a few facts that stand in the face of the Christian community worldwide, asking a simple question. “What have you done for the least of mine?”<sup>19</sup> (Mt.25: 40, NRSV).

Therefore, the church is called to repentance in order to become a pioneer “because God’s will is always ahead of where society is”.<sup>20</sup> “In sum, the church is pioneer, responding to God’s judgment of idolatry and injustice in all of us and to God’s always going before us in mercifully calling us to new and hopeful possibilities.”<sup>21</sup> The same way of *qadosh* as a way of life and witness of the Hebrew people among their pagan neighbours – as an exemplary and holy (‘set apart’ for God’s specific purposes) community – gives us a way into this understanding and practice today.

Finally, Stassen talks about the pastoral aspect of the church, caring for the lost and those marginalised by society. “In this pastoral concern, the church comes to the aid of the needy *directly by itself giving aid, and indirectly by prodding other institutions to do justice to the needy.*” The church is called to be an inclusive and caring community, ready to step in and help in the problems that society is either unable to answer or to act where society is sinfully supportive of certain forms of oppression. This aspect of the church’s nature stems from the holistic nature of God’s ‘contagious’ holiness that cares for all creation. Or, as Stassen puts it, it is a logical implication of “*the presently active rule of God over all things – God as Creator and Ruler.*”<sup>22</sup> After looking briefly at the major aspects of the ‘baptist vision’, we can now turn and see how the current principle of holiness as moral requirement to enter the church hinders the practices of the holiness ministry of baptistic communities.

## 4 Holiness as Principle

For a more concentrated discussion of this issue I will look only at three of Niebuhr’s practices of the church as assessed by Stassen – the pastoral/pioneering/prophetic role. The reason for choosing these particular practices, in this particular order, can easily be understood in the light of the last decade of developments in Eastern Europe. After the collapse of the

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<sup>19</sup> See the reflection on similar issues by Henry Nouwen, *Jesus: A Gospel* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), pp. 133-134.

<sup>20</sup> G. H. Stassen, ‘A New Vision’, p. 233.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., G. H. Stassen, p. 243.

entire ideological system of at least three generations there is a strong vacuum felt in the moral strata of society's life. The Marxist religion of socialism embodied in the Communist movement for a long time had been a central moral agent. It had enough inner strength to keep the system functioning for over seventy years. With the collapse of Communism the search for a new basis for ethics was needed.

This is why, in the first decade after the Soviet Union collapsed, baptistic churches experienced revival and were ministering to this 'spiritual hunger' in the ways that they could. However, when the dust of the falling Berlin wall settled, many of these churches realised that they were unable to engage in a strategic involvement in building a 'new society' – in a pioneering or prophetic way. This was partly due to their status as sectarian groups in the light of the state religions (mainly Orthodox and Roman Catholic). Partly it was a result of the long years of exclusive life style based on a quest for holiness, understood as keeping to a number of rules concerning the individual behaviour of the members, to remain undefiled by the 'spirit' of the Communist regime.

The 'baptist vision', as I discussed it in the previous section, is calling for a paradigm shift. I believe that baptistic churches are called to a **pastoral** ministry in society, a society that is trying to find its way between the old values of socialism and the new troubles of capitalism. Moreover, starting from this ministry, the doors to the other two practices may be opened wide too. Devaluation of the family, materialism, individualism, social insecurity, the challenges of ecology, drugs and child prostitution are but a few of the things that people in former Communist countries are coming to know of on a disastrous scale today. Sincere concern for these issues opens many doors in society to be accepted as a full-bodied part of it, giving a chance to be heard as a **pioneer** and putting no restrictions on the calling to serve **prophetically**.

However, this pastoral/caring involvement in society is still strongly discouraged by the church's 'holiness requirement', making the church once again an exclusivist elitist 'gathering of individual saints' whose ethics is based on abstract deontological absolutes of 'dos' and 'don'ts'.

Many baptistic communities, following the Reformation split, reintroducing the Platonic dichotomy of the 'spiritual' and 'bodily', 'church' and 'secular', and 'divine' and 'worldly',<sup>23</sup> turned the Hebraic understanding of holiness (*qadosh*) from practices into principles and, too

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<sup>23</sup> G. H. Stassen, 'A New Vision', p. 214.

often, into rules. The Christian idea of holiness had been long understood as a gift of God to enable the believer's transformation on entering the new life with Christ.

The Reformation, however, brought this peculiar doctrinal split, separating the idea of sanctification, as a cooperation with God in his salvific purposes, into two different ideas. Jerry L. Walls argues that Reformers wrongly depreciated the dynamics of holiness between God and human beings.

It was a Protestant innovation to separate justification from sanctification and to construe the former primarily in legal and forensic terms. [A]t worst, however, it smacks of the sort of cheap grace, pervasive in much popular contemporary piety, which implies that mere mental assent to some basic Christian doctrines is all that is necessary for salvation.<sup>24</sup>

The Reformers went astray in adopting the Hellenistic (Platonic, to be precise) understanding of the divine, forgetting the Jewish roots of Christian faith. They squeezed this complex narrative understanding of holiness into a formidable set of right doctrines. To understand this difference and the consequences of such 'reductionist holiness' we should look at another important work in ethics by David Gushee and Glen H. Stassen.

Gushee and Stassen discuss four levels of moral reasoning in Christian ethics: the immediate judgment level, the rules level, the principles level and the ground-of-meaning level. In this four-level interactive approach they are showing how Christians construct their convictions in moral reasoning. Let us briefly look at each of the levels.

First, the **immediate judgment** level reflects moral judgment that gives no reasons for what is said and applied to a particular case.<sup>25</sup> We may call it an every-day-moral-reasoning. The second level of moral reasoning is based on more universally applicable **rules** that directly inform what to do and not to do.<sup>26</sup> The third level describes **principles** in moral reasoning that underlie rules and particular judgments, where "understanding principles enables us to affirm the strong need for rules without turning us into legalists".<sup>27</sup> The last and final one is the level of convictional ethical discourse serving as a basis for our principles, rules and the overall

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<sup>24</sup> 'Purgatory for Everyone', *First Things* 122 (April 2002), pp. 26-30.

<sup>25</sup> G. H. Stassen, and D. P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in contemporary context*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.100.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

framework of ethical reasoning. ‘For Christians, God’s character, actions, and will constitute the basic **ground-of-meaning level**.’<sup>28</sup> In the light of this approach I can say that the understanding of holiness in baptistic churches often rests on the principlist or even immediate-judgment level, robbing the holistic narrative of the ground-of-meaning based on the incarnational holiness of God.<sup>29</sup>

Gushee and Stassen are very clear about this kind of moral reasoning and I cannot but quote them in length.

The church’s moral task is not primarily to come up with the right beliefs about issues like euthanasia or peacemaking, and then make sure that every member holds these right beliefs. Nor is it to come up with the right set of timeless virtues and hope that every member will be virtuous. Instead, our central task is to discern which specific *practices* fit the kingdom of God and which attributes of community character are appropriate and fitting for people whose lives are surrendered to God. [T]hus with all our heart we seek to discern and then put into practice a total way of life that advances God’s kingdom.<sup>30</sup>

In a summary of this section we can say that holiness is often understood as a principle for certain behaviours, usually very static, exclusive, and, often, theoretical. The behaviours reflect neither the original Hebraic understanding of *qadosh*, as discussed in the first section of this paper, nor are they serving well in the radically different circumstances of post-Communist societies. I believe that the rightfully perceived concept of holiness rests with the **practices** of the church, involving all four elements of moral reasoning and reflecting the character of the Creator God, incarnationally recalling the narrative story of the Hebrew people and the life of the early Christian communities.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> Consider another statement by the same Christian leader and public figure about the nature of a Christian family, ‘However, the dream came true [to be happy in family life – L.A.] only after I started following God’s principles [about ‘the institution of marriage’ – L.A.] that God left for us in the Bible.’ Or another one just a few paragraphs below, ‘Why God, in the period between creation of the world and new heaven and earth, has established a certain institute called marriage? [M]arriage is God’s invention (sic) for rearing virtuous children’ (Corn, ‘Interview with Jurij Shelestun,’ p. 20). Unfortunately, Shelestun does not specify which particular institute/model he has in mind: Abrahamic, Davidic, Solomonic, Hosaic, Pauline or some other? He further talks about what rules are to be kept if a Christian family is to be happy. These ‘rules’, according to Jurij Shelestun, somehow resemble a common attitude towards women in this society, by and large treating them as household objects and servants (in ‘Christian talk’ euphemistically labelled ‘helpers’) to their husbands. This is a very culturally sensitive Bible, I should say!

<sup>30</sup> *Kingdom Ethics*, p. 122. Cf. ‘The command of the gospel is for conformity with the character of God – character cannot be reduced to rules and regulations any more than it can be reduced to propositions.’ John E. Colwell, *Living the Christian Story* (Edinburgh & New York: T&T Clark, 2001), p. 112.

## 5 Holiness as Practices

One of the key narratives that informs our Christian practices of holiness is the Sermon on the Mount. However, before going any further in this section we need to define what a practice is. Alasdair MacIntyre defines practice as follows

Practice. Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.<sup>31</sup>

In this definition of practice<sup>32</sup> I will highlight four major aspects pertaining to our discussion. First, we can see that practice is a structured and purposeful **communal** activity. As I mentioned in the previous section, a principlist approach to holiness tends to make it a rule-based foundation for the morals of individual church members. Stanley Hauerwas, on this holistic understanding of holiness as a process of perfection in the community, reflecting God's character, says, "the demand to locate and characterize lives of perfection is fundamentally a communal task. For the journey that Christians undertake is the journey of a people. The growth of their individual lives, which certainly is also a journey, is intelligible only within the movement we call the church."<sup>33</sup>

The second aspect of a practice is its pursuit of goals that are beyond the practice itself.<sup>34</sup> Holiness as a practice cannot be based on principles or rules. It is founded in God's character and activity in the world that brings a much larger and complex framework of ethical 'standards' than any list may hold. According to the Gushee/Stassen model of moral reasoning, the concept of holiness should be pursuing its ground-of-meaning level to be firmly **grounded in the character and aims of God**. They should not necessarily follow the culture – that is the reason for initiation of many 'principles' in the churches to save people from 'being polluted' by it. Therefore there is nothing wrong in talking about dos and don'ts but only as a part of and not contradictory to a much more complex concept of holiness.

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<sup>31</sup> *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), p. 175.

<sup>32</sup> See discussion on MacIntyre's definition of practice in McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 166-68.

<sup>33</sup> *Sanctify Them in the Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 142.

<sup>34</sup> McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 28.

Thirdly, a practice is a real-life activity. “Real-life practices must develop means of reaching their goals that are sufficiently stable and sufficiently flexible to permit the growth of the practice and the human life it invests.”<sup>35</sup> Practice has to be firm and flexible at the same time to be truly functioning in the human world in order to be accepted and to be doable. To be sure, practice must have its ‘standards of excellence’ that are appropriate to and in some ways definitive of the practice, but they cannot be encapsulated in rules and principles having no means to be adjusted as life requires. In the Hebrew practice of holiness there was a discernable pattern of rites, festivals, dietary rules and other **means** of being holy. Jesus Christ, fulfilling the law, has set a different pattern of being holy. Now it is to be expressed through **other means** that I will discuss later in this section.

Finally, the fourth aspect of practice is that it actually does something it is **intended** for. As MacIntyre says, “goods internal to that form of activity are realized”. Understanding of holiness as practice is actually seeing it as definitely (1) something one strives to see achieved and (2) an achievable goal. As McClendon puts it, “There is no ‘thing taught’ without *teaching*; no Christian doctrines apart from the **practice of doctrine**.<sup>36</sup> A principlist understanding of holiness is often based on abstract notions of something that may or may not be practical. Ironically, such ‘holiness’ becomes ‘work righteousness’, so much dreaded by believers in *sola gratia*, because it makes a person work hard seeking to reach the unachievable standards that are put forward by the person’s church.<sup>37</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount (SMT) is the primary way in which, from the New Testament, we see holiness expressed as practice. As with many other accounts of holiness in scripture, SMT has suffered neglect or abuse by the church. “[I]n Protestant circles, it is perceived as an idealistic ethic of perfection, intended only to bring us to the conviction of our own inadequacy and to the awareness of our need of mercy.” However, as the argument of John E. Colwell indicates, “Jesus concludes the Sermon with a parable exposing the foolishness of those who hear the words and do not

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<sup>35</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 167.

<sup>36</sup> McClendon, *Doctrine*, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Colwell, *Living the Christian Life*, pp. 113-14. For instance, the principle of considering “family as instituted by God to sustain healthy [both socially and morally – L.A.] society and church” (Corn, ‘Interview with Jurij Shelestun,’ p. 20) looks very questionable in the light of today’s statistics on divorce and singleness. Such an understanding of family has crippled many souls in baptist churches. For the majority of singles, almost all women, marital status becomes an entrance requirement to ‘happiness’ and acceptance both in church life and society. See a criticism of this view from the baptist/catholic perspective in Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional & Modern Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

put them into practice.”<sup>38</sup> It is obvious that the SMT was not concerned with providing the future Christian community with a set of abstract undoable principles.

Glen H. Stassen offers an insightful and important interpretative approach to the SMT. In his work ‘The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount’ (Mt. 5: 21-7:12), Stassen offers the possibility of looking at the issue of holiness as a transforming initiative rather than as classical ‘pointing towards something that will be fulfilled in the heavens’. He suggests looking at the SMT as fourteen carefully crafted ‘triads’ of Jesus’ sayings on how to live holy lives or rather be ‘poor in spirit, meek, merciful and peacemaking’.

They are positive ways of deliverance, as fits the good news of the reign of God announced in the beatitudes, the Lord’s prayer, and throughout the Sermon, rather than negative prohibitions and ‘impossible ideals’ or ‘hard teachings’. [I]t points the way to an ethic of participation – participating in God’s deliverance.<sup>39</sup>

There is no place in this paper to go into depth in analysing the entire significance of Stassen’s thesis.<sup>40</sup> I would like to highlight only four major elements in his approach as it pertains to the purposes of this section, i.e. holiness, understood as practice(s). In Stassen’s triadic interpretation of SMT one may discern that **holiness is a communal practice, grounded in the character of God, having inherent means to be achievable, and translating into reality the intentions it was designed for.**

We can look in more detail at Stassen’s interpretation of the triad found in Matthew 5:21-26, “To avoid ever being angry would be an impossible ideal, but to go and be reconciled with a brother or sister is the way of deliverance from anger that fits prophetic prophecies of the reign of God in which peace replaces war.”<sup>41</sup> Jesus here talks about the traditional teaching of righteousness (the principle or law of not murdering). In the second part of the triad he speaks of what Stassen calls a vicious cycle we are trapped in – ‘being angry and insulting’. The final part of the triad is a

<sup>38</sup> *Living the Christian Story*, p. 112. For a similar and even broader assessment of different ways of rationalisations of SMT see David Garland in W.E.Mills and R.F.Wilson, (gen.ed) *MERCER Dictionary of the Bible* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995), pp. 810-811; and Glen H. Stassen, ‘Love, Justice, and “Realism”: Twelve Ways of “Adjusting” the Sermon on the Mount to Worldly Reality’, unpublished paper, available through the author.

<sup>39</sup> (SCE Scripture Ethics Group), on-line available, <http://www.fuller.edu/sot/faculty/stassen>. For an earlier formulation of Stassen’s approach see G.H.Stassen, *Just Peacemaking* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 33-88.

<sup>40</sup> It has been debated, assessed and widely acclaimed by the participants in the conference ‘Discipleship and formation of Christian Character’, 18-24 August 2001, IBTS, Prague.

<sup>41</sup> ‘The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount’.

'transforming initiative', "a new way of deliverance [from the relational problems in community-L.A.] that is neither murder nor anger nor merely their negative prohibition".<sup>42</sup>

Following this triadic pattern we can discern the elements of holiness as a set of practices. Jesus **does not expect the impossible** – to fulfil the law ("you heard **this...**" vs.21) – since he is acknowledging that we are in the vicious cycles despite the intentions of the Law to be a safeguard for the relationships in God's community ("you heard this.... **But...**" vs.22). Furthermore, we see that Jesus is concerned with the well-being of his **community** ("whoever is angry with his brother or sister...vs.22"), showing holiness is not an existential morality.

Further, it has a built-in **means** of avoiding the perpetuation of the conflict that leads to death according to the law ("when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift..." vs.23-24, NRSV). Jesus offers a concrete way of making peace (an imperative "go and reconcile"), translating the **intentions** of the law as a safeguard into the reality of living according to the law's expectations. Finally, (look at Matthew 5:9) being a peacemaker one **will share the nature of God** ("will be called a child of God") or, as Stassen has suggested, one will fit the message of peace so fervently proclaimed by the prophets of YHWH.

## 6 Conclusion

The understanding of holiness as a requirement to be a member of a good Eastern European baptistic church has proved to serve rather poorly those communities that practice it. Post-Soviet realities do not condone seclusion and sectarianism. Even if it is a valid option for every congregation to choose from, it certainly hinders a fully-fledged witness in modern society.

The fresh 'baptist vision' calls the church to apostolic, pioneering and pastoral mission in the world. This mission cannot be fulfilled by building an ethic on abstract, individualistic and undoable principles and rules. Detached principlist understandings of holiness obscure the holistic concept of holiness as reflecting God's character. This is why the Hebrew

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

prophets cried for the law to be written in human hearts and minds rather than stone tablets, for “ultimately only character can portray character”.<sup>43</sup>

The ‘baptist vision’ calls for holiness as a building of character or teleological practice(s). Holiness as practice(s) is understood as grounded in the character of God, as communal, and as having inherent means to be doable. Such a vision seeks to translate into reality the intentions for which holiness was designed, with the Sermon on the Mount as the primary source in which we see holiness as a set of practices and not as a set of idealistic and barely practical principles and rules. This is, I believe, the way to go if Christian communities are still to matter in the years to come.

**Linas Andronovas** holds an MTh in Applied Theology through IBTS and is Executive Secretary of the Baptist Union of Lithuania.

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<sup>43</sup> Colwell, *Living the Story*, p. 112.

## Abuse and Family Violence

“Most of the violence in the world happens in living rooms.” (Dr Miroslav Volf, Public Lecture, 5 October 2001, IBTS, Prague)

### Introduction

Having been concerned with the wellbeing of society and trying to find relevant answers to questions related to family issues, more specifically abuse and violence in the family<sup>1</sup>, I was challenged by the idea of how social insecurity like unemployment, economical transition, and migration affects family structure and dynamics.

The goal of this work is to present the current family and social ethic dynamics within Hungarian Baptist churches in Romania. A case study will be presented as a tool. Attention is paid to the whole community, which is also affected by and is often the source that generates the problem.

The objectives of the study are to define the areas of conflict between the family, to provide a biblical perspective on the conflict and to offer a practical solution. The logic of the presentation is three dimensional – the issue of abuse and family violence will be discussed through analyses of the current economic crisis, family values and structure crisis, and the emotional crisis, originated in the damage caused by abuse.

### The Case

A. lives in the centre of a town in Romania. He is married, has three children, and regularly attends the Baptist Church with his family. Having been raised in a Christian home, A. considers church life very important. He and his wife moved to the town for financial reasons from a nearby village after they married. The communist government provided them with jobs and a flat. Both were appreciated in their respective jobs and worked hard to raise their children in an even better way than they had been by providing them with a proper education. The mother was especially concerned to send the children for further studies.

It looked as though they might be able to fulfil their plans for their children. Their hard work permitted them to move to a larger flat after ten years of marriage in order to provide more space for their growing family.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘violence’ and ‘abuse’ used in this work refer to causing physical and emotional harm by aggressive behaviour. As the case study will reflect, in the language of the abusive Christian families, this may appear as ‘discipline’.

Both A. and his wife were raised in a traditional village environment and were taught what decent behaviour entailed. Roles in the family were very clear: the wife washed the dishes, cooked, looked after the children, while the husband was the financial provider. A. has a strong personality. He was at times neglectful, and this meant that his relationship with his wife and teenage children suffered. He considered his actions to be in keeping with scripture, since he was 'the head of the family'.

### **The Social and Economic Background of the Ethical Problem**

With the so-called Revolution in December 1989, A. and his family had to face some changes and difficulties. The shift in the economics of the country from governmentally-supported institutions and industry to a market economy brought about widespread unemployment. A. became unemployed. The euphoria of liberty was followed by feelings of insecurity and paralysis. That the government would no longer 'support', 'care' and 'redistribute' meant the loss of economic security for many in the country, including A. Some found employment again by bribing individuals who were overseeing the hiring of workers, but being a Christian, A. found this unethical and would not do it.

With the changes in the country, many people who had owned property prior to communism were able to get it back. A's parents were able to regain their property too. Cultivating their land could fill some of the economic needs but did not provide enough for every-day living. Some people resolved their economic problems by using the opportunities that the Hungarian black market offered. This presumed working unofficially, in most cases, and being far from home, visiting only for one weekend a month. Obviously this was not a long-term solution but could be the easiest and most productive source for A.

Living in a wine-growing region, A. had easy access to inexpensive alcohol. With his unemployment and financial difficulties weighing heavily upon him, he began drinking heavily. This helped him to suppress depressive thoughts of being unemployed and no longer able to support his family. His wife attempted to stop him from this heavy drinking, but this made him aggressive, even to the point of beating his family (which he saw as 'instructing' and 'disciplining' them). At first, the family tried to keep the secret, but as time passed the evidence of abuse spoke for itself.

## The Task of the Church

Belonging to a Baptist Christian community in a Romanian context seems to mean being over-watched by the church. Even though the family became somewhat alienated from others in the church, the members and pastor noticed the negative shift that this family had taken. What role might the church play, firstly, in helping A. to cope with his aggression and have a healthy understanding of family-life? And then, what resources might the wider Hungarian Baptist community from Romania use in order to help its members in the transition period of the country? Moreover, how can the church provide a healthy education for its members, especially the future generation, in order to prevent abuse in the family?

I plan to deal with these questions from a three-crisis perspective: the economic crisis, the crisis originated in the patriarchal church and society, and the crisis determined by the abuse. From the case study one can easily see the interrelation of the three. Before elaborating the problem of abuse, I will present my perspective on the crises and also possible resolutions.

**The economic crisis** – that arises because of the present socio-economic situation in Romanian society. On the one hand, Baptist churches benefit from the social and political privileges of society and thus resolve the economic problems of unemployed families; on the other hand, they are not prepared to face the problems that originate in families from the absence of one of the family members, usually the father, who is considered the bread-winner. The purpose of this part is to define the problem and to make ourselves aware of it without considering the possible resolutions that need more thorough examination of the situation. It will bring, though, a suggestion considering the **practice of watch-care** for those who try to resolve their economic problems by choosing to leave their homes to earn money in Hungary.

**The crisis of the patriarchal church and society** – that shows itself mostly in the living rooms of families (as Dr Miroslav Wolf rightly put it) and by this being an open secret and taboo. The unfair distribution of roles in the family, as for men so for women, often leads to abuse. Therefore this part is going to bring a new definition of roles, at least new for those in eastern-European society. The family will be considered, as it has been already defined, as an interdependent unit of the larger, extended family, the local Christian community. The **practice of partnership** will be considered as a resolution for the problems of roles in the family.

**The abuse** – that originates in the already-presented miss-functions of family and society. Patterns and habits of society are not easily changed, especially if most of the members of that society accept these as normal. However, the underestimation of the role and responsibility of women and the increasing need for women to participate in the activity of society might cause discrepancy in the existing unspoken law of society. For this reason practical and applicable ways need to be found to make women aware of their value and responsibility to participate, and especially those who prove to have a wrong self-perception of their place and role. Also the pastoral, therapeutic responsibility of the church cannot be neglected in those cases where abuse exists.

## 1 Describing the economic crisis and defining the problem

The social and economic changes that are faced by the government of the country are also reflected in the life of church members. Before looking closely at the primary effect of the changes on the church, I suggest a more general consideration of the problem, from the viewpoint of society. The transition from a centralised economy creates serious problems, as the different mechanisms of the past ‘heritage’ have to be overcome. “Re-education towards creativity and initiative, which was formerly stifled but which is so important for the free-market economy, may take considerable time”<sup>2</sup> as Peter Kuzmic rightly states.

One of the issues faced by our churches, especially in rural areas, is the emptying of the churches during the summer. The reason for this is that members of the church who find themselves unemployed choose to go and work in the west, mainly in Hungary but other countries as well, such as Germany or Austria, to provide for their families. Generally men are leaving their families but there are women who also leave for short periods of time, especially when there are no children who need to be cared for. As described earlier, the roles in the family are that men are the providers and women are homebuilders and educators of the children. It is true that people have regained their lands but, with the primitive tools that they own, agriculture cannot be profitable even though it is a source of living of these people.

After the fall of communism and with the opening up of new possibilities, including opportunities to cross the border of the country, the increase in unemployment has forced people to use the new possibilities as

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Kuzmic, ‘The Communist Impact on the Church in Eastern Europe’, *Evangelical Review of Theology* (vol. 20, 1996), p. 61.

a material resource. Hungary seemed to be the closest and, for those belonging to the Hungarian ethnic minority in Romania, the most convenient. The Hungarian government has had a strong attitude of responsibility towards helping to preserve the national identity of the surrounding Hungarians. For this reason the Parliament of the Republic of Hungary has adopted an Act relating to Hungarians living abroad.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this Act is to provide support for those people with a Hungarian background who are living in the Republic of Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Romania, the Republic of Slovenia, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine. According to this Act, people that belong to the above mentioned group enjoy economic privileges as well as cultural, scientific and educational benefits. They can be employed in the territory of Hungary on the basis of a permit issued for a maximum of three months and under the regulation of this Act.

The negative side of this is that, while providing materially, being away from the family for long periods is detrimental and thus can be considered only as a temporary solution. On the one hand people acknowledge the provisional role of this option but on the other they are forced materially into a situation where the temporary becomes permanent. For this reason the ideal solution would be to develop self-help groups among the Baptist community. There are a few such private enterprises but these are only able to meet the needs of a few people. Also wanting to be part of the wider society, a separation of this type would not be an advisable choice. However, the problem exists and it has to be faced by a great number of Baptist believers. Certainly disregarding the social background and only taking account of the negative effects of separation of families would be like handling the crisis with an 'ostrich policy'. How then can the community of believers help its members in this crisis?

Firstly, by being present in the political implementation of the Act. In order to be subjects of the above mentioned Act, Hungarians living in Romania have to prove their Hungarian ethnicity. According to the regulation of the Law they are able to do that by proving their membership of a Hungarian religious group such as the traditional churches of Transylvania: Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran Evangelical or Unitarian. Baptists also have a representative on the approving committee, in the person of Istvan Borzasi who is the vice-president responsible for theological education in the Hungarian Baptist Convention of Romania and

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<sup>3</sup> Act LXII of 2001 on Hungarians living in Neighbouring Countries, Adopted by the Parliament on 19 June 2001.

an ordained pastor.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Baptists participate in this kind of engagement can be considered as a rudimentary involvement in the wider life of the society and culture and also an opening to conversation and co-operation. However, there is a strong attitude of separation from participation in the front line of political life.

Secondly, those who choose to leave for periods of time to provide for their families, using the possibilities offered by the Hungarian labour market, have to be offered special attention and care within local churches. Primarily they have to be made aware of the temporality of this resolution and of the risk factor of alienation and separation of the families, and also a lack of healthy parental education of the children. Seeking to be a community that pays attention to its members and cares without controlling, this practice has to be extended even when personal contact is lost. The members who leave are already strongly advised to find and be involved in the life of a church in their new surroundings, but sometimes, because of lack of time and information, this does not happen. For this reason, a stronger partnership with the Hungarian Baptist churches could result in the development of a ‘watch care’ practice of members. Mapping the most-often visited regions by Romanian workers and consequently mapping of churches would be the first step. Then creating workshops of the pastors in these regions, with the purpose of defining common goals, would lead to building bridges and relationships. Both parties affected by this type of migration need, first of all, to communicate and find common socially-oriented solutions. Judging and spiritualising the problem will not lead to resolution, but taking practical steps toward providing support can help people to cope with the situation they are in.

## **2 Developing the practice of partnership between men and women in the Church**

Many of the women in our society and churches live in a patriarchal family, and marry a traditionally-minded husband. Even if they do not feel oppressed and may experience a loving and caring environment, they can gain new perspectives in their responsibility and contribution to the good of their homes, communities and society at large by listening to those who are experiencing the negative side of patriarchal society. For the refocusing of our attention from patriarchal society to a practice of partnership, and with the purpose of finding a preventive solution to the problem of abuse, I am

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<sup>4</sup> Information related to the implication of the Law were gathered from Istvan Borzasi, member of the approving committee, through a personal letter, dated 20<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

going to discuss the meaning of equality from the standpoint of the extended family, the Christian community.

Those of us living in Eastern Europe know from our experiences of communism that total equality does not exist. Even though people were considered equal, there were people who represented the ‘more equal’<sup>5</sup> strata, enjoying special advantages and privileges of redistribution. By enforcing on individuals the same kind of houses and the same amount of salaries did not and will not prevent one person rising above another by their unique abilities, personal virtues and skills or even privileges. The idea of equality considered as an ideal of human society is often applied to family life also. The constitution<sup>6</sup> of our country protects the value of equal citizenship on a theoretical level of possibilities, rights and responsibilities. If men and women are considered equal members of society then they ought to be seen in the same way when they are husband and wife. What then is equality? Can it be defined in terms that are realistic and reachable? With the purpose of finding answers to these questions let us follow the way of argumentation of Michael Walzer.

While looking at society with the spectacles of a social political scientist, Walzer says that ‘Human society is a distributive community ..., we come together to share, divide and exchange’<sup>7</sup>. Throughout history distributive justice has happened in different ways but the most important mechanism, as Walzer put it, which provided a frame for it, was market. However, he comes to the conclusion that justice cannot happen in only one way and argues for pluralistic justice. According to his theory, we need to distinguish different spheres of life. As a result of society’s corruptness, a sphere might become dominant and might yield inequality. Total equal distribution of goods can be achieved only by reinforcement but this is a ‘simple equality’ and presumes sameness and uniformity. Complex equality, then, appears between the different spheres and acknowledges personal differences<sup>8</sup>. Walzer defines the complex egalitarian society as “in which no different social goods are monopolistically held – .... barring continual state intervention – but in which no particular good is generally convertible”<sup>9</sup>.

The opposite of this is tyranny. One might be unequal with another in a certain sphere such as politics or economics but this will not give them

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<sup>5</sup> See George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (Penguin Books, 1951).

<sup>6</sup> The Constitution of Romania, published In Monitorul Oficial No. 233, 21 November 1991, art. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) p.3.

<sup>8</sup> David H. Smith, *Anglican Theological Review* – book-review (vol. 67, 1985), pp. 293-295.

<sup>9</sup> M. Walzer, *ibid.* p.17.

opportunity to dominate over the other. Distribution of social goods, in order to prevent domination, should happen, according to Walzer, following the principles of free exchange or equal treatment on the basis of what one deserves and needs or one's rights.<sup>10</sup> In other words one cannot be considered equal with the other in all matters (spheres, as defined by Walzer); therefore, considering personal differences in abilities we need to approve complementarity. From our point of view this differentiation of contribution by abilities to the production of social goods such as welfare, commodities, security, hard work, position of employment, cannot be made primarily on gender. Yes, we have to admit the biological and psychological differences of men and women and yet to state, together with Fox-Genovese, that "Justice requires that women enjoy equality with men in all spheres of life. The precise meaning of equality, however, which could refer to opportunity or results, remained elusive and variable according to the situation, but the ideal has acquired iconic standing."<sup>11</sup> However, we need to find possible ways of dealing with the roles in a predominantly patriarchal society where "As a little economy and a little state, ruled by the father-king, the family has long been a setting for the domination of wives and daughters (sons, too)... The family has long been woman's place; ... Within the household, if only there, she often possessed considerable power."<sup>12</sup>

Parallel to Walzer's thoughts and more closely to our target group is Despina Dumitrica, a Romanian journalist's presentation of women's status in our society. She points out that "women are regarded primarily as mothers and wives, assigned to a less powerful position in society"<sup>13</sup>. The core of the problem, as she defines it, is not to be found primarily in society's suppression but in the self-perception of women that is 'mother-wife-housewife' which leads, in many cases, to abuse. "Whatever happens within the home is perceived as a matter of private business. Human rights stop at the family door"<sup>14</sup> continues Dumitrica when analysing the situation. It is true that privacy has gained increased importance in our society. Whereas, several years ago, communities were strongly tied together, determining values and even rules, nowadays individualisation and privatisation have appeared, even among Christians. The family shows

<sup>10</sup> For the alternative definition of the terms see: Ed. by David Miller and Michael Walzer, *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, with responses by Stanley J. Grenz, Mardi Keyes and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *Women and the Future of the Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p.26.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>13</sup> Despina Dumitrica, Romanian Women Don't Wear the Trousers, *Central European Review* (vol.2, No 39, 13 November, 2000), p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.4.

a strong intention towards operating independently from the community as such. While taking advantage of the goods that the community provides, such as a place to socialise, get information and be enriched spiritually, families prefer to decide by themselves the orders and rules that are practised within their walls. Simultaneously they are not even aware of the determinative role of the wider community and culture. This is why wives see themselves being obedient and humble while enduring their husbands misuse of power, being persuaded that this is the biblical and good Christian attitude.

I would like to challenge this understanding by the already-presented model of complex equality and by proposing a development of practice of partnership through the wider, extended family that is the Christian community, to the small unit, the family. Let us start with a statement of Donald G. Bloesch according to which “Patriarchy calls for male supremacy. Feminism calls for female autonomy. Covenantalism calls for male-female partnership.”<sup>15</sup> As was presented in my previous work<sup>16</sup>, according to a theology of healthy marriage, the man and woman, wife and husband are, in the best definition not companions but partners of each other. After becoming members of the extended family, that is the church, by baptism, they are primarily brothers and sisters of each other and then disciples of Christ. In this relationship with each other and with Jesus Christ, they are shaped and their characters formed. Also in this relationship they are witnesses. So, to discuss partnership of the family members we need to start from the viewpoint of the community.

By Jesus’ coming into our world, a new rule of life has been established. The creation as we know it from Genesis has been reformulated in accordance with Jesus’ goal (Jn. 1). Because of Him, ethics have a social orientation. It is “a way of life, not for isolated individuals but for individuals in community. In fact it is a way of new individuals in a new family”<sup>17</sup> as Clapp has stated. The building of the Kingdom that has arrived physically, spiritually and socially has a primary focus for the disciples. They are brothers and sisters of each other and also working together as partners in this work. Because of my initial focus on family relationships in this work, we need to look closer at how partnership is

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<sup>15</sup>Donald G. Bloesch, ‘Is the Bible Sexist? Beyond Feminism and Patriarchalism’, *Readings in Christian Ethics, Volume 2: Issues and Applications*, Ed. by David Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), p.313. This is a correct statement but I do not agree with the final conclusion of his investigation.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Is Divorce a Resolution to Marital Problems?’ Module: Social Ethics, IBTS Academic Archives, Prague, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p.77.

understood between couples, without losing the main context of the larger family. For help in argumentation along the already-presented theory of Walzer, I will call upon Diana and David Garland, a social worker and a biblical theologian respectively. They define three types of relationship, which are traditional (hierarchical, the man rules over the family), companionship (egalitarian, spouse shares power and responsibility) and partnership. They present the partnership type as biblical in opposition to the two previous one's which are culturally determined and sociologically defined. Equality as it is understood in relation to companionship, might be associated with Walzer's simple equality and, presumably, applied to family relations, while his idea of complex equality fits the biblical idea of partnership. As the Garlands pointed out "the basis of partnership marriage is the mutual respect, equality and intimacy found in companionship marriage, but it involves .... a joint calling from God"<sup>18</sup>. The couple is not concerned primarily with 'who is doing what' but 'what is the goal to be reached'.

Having in mind the presented case, their problem is not primarily the lack of material provision and resources but undeveloped skills of problem resolution, the oppressive effects of the patriarchal role and the lack of commonly defined goals. When is it more necessary to realise the need of one another than in the midst of an economical problem? If the couple realises that both of them have a part in planning, organising and implementing shared tasks – that they are co-workers 'in the same field' – it might help them to resolve their first and foremost relational problems.<sup>19</sup> Obviously cultural determination and general traditionalist mentality causes difficulties in the problem resolving process. Those who might be called to help also need to step out from their own thinking in order to help those who are not able anymore to help themselves. As it has been stated earlier, for some, traditional structures do not cause difficulties but attention must be paid to those who suffer from them.

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<sup>18</sup> Diana S. Richmond Garland and David E. Garland, *Beyond Companionship: Christians in Marriage* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p.68.

<sup>19</sup> A seminar held in a conference on Trafficking of Women in Eastern and Central Europe at the Ecumenical Academy, Prague, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2002, with the theme 'Migration and Globalisation', and also a personal conversation with Tony Addy (CEE and Globalisation Personnel), the speaker at the seminar, has helped me to see more clearly the changes in gender roles in the family that relate to practical life. At the same time, preserving the patriarchal stereotypes, in many cases determines abuse. While women take over the role as provider, feeling more responsibility for their children, they are still over-ruled by the unemployed and abusive husband and father who still over-rules them.

### 3 Preventing Abuse

As previously shown, the major problems of society are mirrored in the family. For many, family is a resting-place from every-day burdens or the place that is meant to project heaven on earth. In reality, we will realise that this does not even fit the biblical and Christian purpose of marriage and family-life. Yes, the members of the family might and ought to find comfort in the intimacy of the relationships in which they find themselves as members, yet they are also provoked by that intimacy. The well-being of the family should not be considered as the goal but as the tool that contributes to the witnessing task of Christians.

The Christian family is a ‘mission base’ as Rodney Clapp<sup>20</sup> rightly points out. Its starting point is a covenant, made not only between the parties but also in relation to the witnessing church. This is more than contracts, which can be dissolved as the common interests disappear. It is commitment based on mutual faithfulness to each other and to the covenant that has been made. For a successful marriage, both wife and husband are expected to contribute, knowing that “neither women nor men are likely to make compromises, much less sacrifices, for the good of the family as a whole if they do not expect the marriage to survive.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it is important to emphasise that the best way of escaping from problems is to resolve them, otherwise in one way or another they will return maybe in another relationship.

Anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists have a growing conviction that men and women differ from each other in how they perceive and react in the world. Definitely these have to be seen as enriching factors. I believe that the ‘one-ness’ that is described by the Bible has to be understood from this perspective. Feminist endeavours are welcomed if they accept complementarity.<sup>22</sup> Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen’s reflection on the passage in Genesis 3:16 is remarkably thoughtful. She points out that the sin of the men is in the domination over women but the female’s sin is in their desire for community, “to use the preservation of those relationships as an excuse not to exercise accountable dominion in the first place”. In other words, to avoid taking responsibility for anything

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<sup>20</sup> R. Clapp, *ibid.*, p.155.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, with responses by Stanley J. Grenz, Mardi Keyes and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen: *Women and the Future of the Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> See ‘Gender Issues’, *Readings in Christian Ethics, Volume 2: Issues and Applications*, Eds. David Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 293-298.

more than personal relationships. It is a serious temptation indeed for “it so easily masquerades as a virtue”.<sup>23</sup>

I would like to challenge women who hold on to traditional values in society by this idea. Is it not easier to stay in the background? Is this really what God meant us to do? Should not we Baptist women, in the context of Romanian society, reformulate our understanding of self-sacrifice? These questions might be answered with a tune of self-realisation and individualisation but I am not after claiming an unnatural reorganisation of society. We have experienced the deleterious results of the artificial manipulation of societal structures. What I desire is a fair, biblically-approved and socially-considered relatedness between women and men generally and also wife and husband particularly. I propose that “in an unjust society, there is a need to recognise differences created by past injustices and to correct them with unequal treatment. Moreover, this unequal treatment is required by the ideal of equality itself.”<sup>24</sup> The best way of finding a solution is to start from where we are. After analysing the actual situation we need to admit that the past has presented values, the fruits of which we are enjoying today.

While claiming equality and unity, I need to clarify and distinguish these terms from egalitarianism and uniformity. As it has already been stated, differences are attributes that ought to contribute to enrichment instead of separation from each other. Being different can also ruin a relationship and, in our case, non-communication of the differences in perception and expectation had certainly brought deterioration in the life of the couple I am considering. An elevated level of stress and anxiety triggers fear and anger. It is a normal reaction of our body and instinct in situations that are new, and also these emotions serve to help the person to overcome the situation. Therefore it is enormously important to recognise and face the roots of the aggressive behaviour and try to cope with them.<sup>25</sup> In the case of the couple, this behaviour appears on the part of the husband, A., and derives from the unstable social situation. Facing the real problem, A., suppresses his feelings and, as a result, expresses his desperation as aggression. It is a general claim of psychologists that every behaviour is a

<sup>23</sup> Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, ‘Christian Maturity in Light of Feminist Theory’, *Readings in Christian Ethics, Volume 2: Issues and Applications*, Ed. by David Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), p. 308.

<sup>24</sup> James P. Sterba, *Justice for Here and Now* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.84. It is important to note the similarity of Sterba’s thought with Walzer’s theory of equality.

<sup>25</sup> Diana S. Richmond Garland and David E. Garland, *Beyond Companionship – Christians in Marriage* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986) pp. 98-124.

communication; likewise A's. To resolve the problem of the family I argue that it is not enough to remove the social reasons such as unemployment and material insecurity that brought the conflict to the surface. That would only alleviate the illness; instead, they need curing. How then do we bring about a resolution that focuses on the roots and that is lasting?

I suggest taking advantage of this family's original Christian endeavour and willingness to participate in community, even though they have suffered alienation since the conflict has deepened. Unquestionably the church has to raise its voice in relation to family issues like these. Also of importance is the attitude and standpoint that is represented by the church. Is it judging, dismissing or empathising, helping and embracing? Considering the church as the extended family, their role has to be explicit and clear. The most efficient way of dealing with difficulties is to invest in their prevention. A serious reconsideration of roles in the family is needed. Taking the Bible and considering today's social changes when, in most families, women need to work as well to contribute to the family budget, I believe that women in the church need to redefine their role and contribution to society. Is it not possible that sharing responsibilities as providers in the family might be considered as today's understanding of being a helper, a partner?

While women take part in certain areas of the life of the church, they still need to be encouraged to recognise the values that they can bring to the life of the community and society. By gathering them into socially oriented activities such as handicrafts, diaconical action, motivating them to be more effective in their status as women, I believe we can strengthen them.<sup>26</sup> In the context of already existing women's Bible study groups, attention can be drawn to the passages in the Bible where women are encouraged to take initiative and participate actively, such as Proverbs 31, as preventive community guidance.

Women might appear weaker from a physical point of view but at the same time prove to have an exceptional spiritual and relational resource. Most women are aware of this and exercise it in a positive and/or negative way. David W. Augsburge says "As we observe that female patterns of conflict management are in fact often superior to male styles, we may recognise that learning from both genders is not only necessary, but the survival of both may depend on men, at last, learning more human

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<sup>26</sup> A possible way of doing it would be recalling of the natural resources such as the cultural and social events embedded in tradition, like organised handicraft evenings that were, several decades ago, permanent events of the village community.

alternatives from women.”<sup>27</sup> The woman’s willingness to make peace is, in many cases, the key to abuse. Because of the unspoken calling to provide a harmonious environment, they are ready to compromise and be subjected to abuse or even persuaded about the rightness of it. For this reason the first step is to set up a framework to reintegrate families into the community and to provide care and protection. As Garland also points out:

One of the most significant ways to prevent family violence is to provide a community in which people look out for and know one another. Violent families are often isolated... A community of persons who know the family can be the first to pick up warning signals of violence. Unfortunately, the isolation of these families often means they are not involved in a community of faith.<sup>28</sup>

This community not only watches over but also has a theology of peace that gives opportunity and makes possible family therapy and pastoral counselling and developing the practice of partnership at both communal and family levels. Mary H. Scherz<sup>29</sup> proposes six images that help us to develop this “theology of shalom” as she defines it. These are creation, covenant, community, cult, cross and consummation. Seeing God and ourselves through these powerful and determinative images, we can redefine the role of man and woman in the community. Real resolution as, also, Scherz suggests comes if both man and woman work together in finding a way out of damaging stereotypes, and she goes further, saying that “a clear understanding of God’s delight in us as men and women may help us delight in ourselves and each other.”<sup>30</sup>

Finally, one more warning is worth considering. “Violent families are not only dangerous for their members; they also teach children that violence is the way to solve life problems.”<sup>31</sup> With this in mind, for the purpose of raising a spiritually healthy future generation that is able to mature in their relationships and in their personality, we need to unify the forces against abuse by acting according to a shalom theology.

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<sup>27</sup> David W. Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1992) p.172.

<sup>28</sup> Diana R. Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downer Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), p.597.

<sup>29</sup> Ed. Elizabeth G. Yoder, *Peace Theology and Violence Against Women*, Mary H. Scherz, ‘Creating in the Space Justice Around Us: Towards Biblical Theology of Peace Between Men and Women’ (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1992) Occasional Papers No.16, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> D. R. Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*, p.593.

## Conclusion

Whether we acknowledge it or not, society takes part in the life of the members of our churches. The social changes that we have experienced and experience are not always preferred as they happen. Twelve years ago, looking forward to freedom and democracy, people were not aware of the price that has had to be paid in order to enjoy the fruits of it. Those who were raised and socialised in the communist era were not prepared for such changes. Listening to people, we can often hear how they look back at the time when material security was provided. They easily forget the empty stores, just like the Israelites in the desert. But the main problem is when this crisis unbalances families and communities, and results in failure to cope with it.

By facing the social reality, I intended to provide a better understanding of violence and abuse in the family. The church ought to have a well-developed attitude toward the new social issues. There is also a need for the church to reconsider its thinking on the role of men and women in its community and in the family. This work, while trying to offer a resolution to a particular problem, also had, as its aim, to address the whole community. We know that advancement needs time and forbearance. It is also important to acknowledge that the first step on the way to resolution is in facing the problem. Keeping an open eye on the suffering that abuse causes, helping people towards conversation and developing skills of problem solving, is a task that our Hungarian Baptist community in Romania has to become involved in as she takes seriously the task of pastoring and witnessing.

**Magda Maria Pap** holds an MTh in Applied Theology through IBTS and is now sponsored by Global Women working on social issues in the ministries of Harghita Christian Camp in Transylvania as Mission and Programme Coordinator.

## Happily Ever After? An Investigative Analysis on the Spiritual Life of William Cowper

### ***Once upon a time...***

...in a land far away lived a beautiful young princess named Isabelle. She was the only daughter of the mighty King Adrian and was loved by all. Every afternoon she played in the royal gardens. She danced with the chipmunks and sang with the robins. But one day...<sup>1</sup>

Now comes the drama and the danger. The wide-eyed young audience listens with joyful fright as it experiences the adventures of Princess Isabelle as she is snatched away by a wicked dragon and suffers under the curses of the evil wizard. The fright is joyful because the audience knows the dragon will be destroyed, the wizard will be thrown into a well (only to return in the next story) and Princess Isabelle will be rescued by a handsome prince. Everyone likes a storybook ending. The fight, the drama, and the pain all come together for a final victorious ending. ‘And they all lived happily ever after’ is what every child is waiting for within these fairytales. It is this closing which says that everything is okay.

As people grow they mature out of these fairytale fantasies into real life. Dragons and wizards become bills and employers. The royal garden becomes a two-car garage and the king’s castle is a three-storey house with green shutters. Though the stories have ceased the fairytale ideal lives on in the mind. Just as before there is a desire for the good to win over the bad; a desire for calm waters, easy explanations and fairytale endings. This is not only a desire, but an expectation.

In the Christian world the expectation is the same, only here it is built upon a theological base (though a shaky one). Christians have glibly transformed ‘happily ever after’ into ‘all things work together for good’, thus conveying the message that when anguish and problems enter a Christian’s life, the problem will be short-lived and come to a joyous end. However, Christians cannot shake from themselves the shadow of historical and present realities. There are individuals who have walked the Christian life and did not find it a pleasant journey. It was a continuous struggle of unexplainable heartache. The travel was through the dry deserts with only small and seldom oases of refreshing pools.

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<sup>1</sup> This fairytale is an original work.

William Cowper is one of these men who rock our boat of theological comfort. He faced serious bouts of depression and attempted suicide, with his life ending in emotional despair. Many times throughout his life Cowper was convinced that God had abandoned him, leaving him doomed for eternity. Conversely this same man wrote:

I love thee, therefore, O my God,  
And breathe towards thy dear abode;  
Where, in thy presence fully blest,  
Thy chosen saints forever rest.<sup>2</sup>

He wrote a great number of hymns that express thanksgiving and the magnificence of God. The question that arises is how one can reconcile Cowper's dark times of hopeless misery with these writings.

This study will begin by tracing William Cowper's life, to determine what made up this confusing man. Noteworthy people and circumstances with which he interacted on his journey will be covered. Depression, grief and lost love formed Cowper's personality; moreover these same influences clearly marked his spiritual formation indelibly. Nevertheless, even with his depression and hopelessness, there was a platform onto which Cowper always fell. Though he sank to deep levels of depression with suicidal thoughts and actions, there was a sustaining conviction that kept him from the extremities of despair.<sup>3</sup> Through analysing his writings and his history, this platform will be uncovered and attempted to be understood.

## Cowper's Story

The thread of sorrow began to weave its way throughout William Cowper's life from the very beginning. In November 1731, in the English town of Great Berkhamstead, William was born into a family already familiar with grief from the loss of three infant children. After William was born two more infants died before the second and final son, John, was born. The joy of a successful childbirth came with the stark pain of the death of William's mother. William, then six years old, was sent away to boarding school.

Boarding school carried daily miseries for William. This specifically came in the form of an older boy who selected William as the recipient of his incessant bullying. Cowper reflects back to this torture in later writings.

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<sup>2</sup> William Cowper, 'The Complete Works of William Cowper', n.p. Cited 17 October 2003. Online: <http://www.ccel.org/c/cowper/works/home.html>.

<sup>3</sup> 'Extreme' meaning he was never successful in his attempted suicides.

... it will be sufficient to say, that he had, by his savage treatment of me, impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift up my eyes upon him, higher than his knees; and that I knew him by his shoe-buckles, better than any other part of his dress.<sup>4</sup>

William continued his education at the Westminster private school. He left Westminster at the age of 18 and from 1749 to 1759 apathetically followed a law career which was pressed upon him by his father.

Also beginning in 1749 was a heartbreak love story for William.<sup>5</sup> He was a regular weekend visitor to the home of young Theodora. Their romantic relationship lasted seven years, even to the point of engagement, only to be brought to a halt by her father. His reason for forbidding the marriage was two-fold: he was dubious of the emotional stability of William; and William and Theodora were cousins.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout Cowper's youth, the loss of his mother, the absence of his father, the bullying in school and this forsaken love constructed a painful beginning. Though certainly there were times of joy and pleasure, it was the tragedies which made serious lasting blemishes upon his sensitive spirit. Theodora's father recognised Cowper's inability to contend with these events. The rest of Cowper's life confirms this wariness.

Three years into his apprenticeship, at 21 years of age, Cowper experienced his first dark depression. During this time the poetical writings of George Herbert (1593-1633) brought some solace. Herbert was a deeply religious man whose works articulate inner spiritual unrest. “[T]he thread that runs through all the poems is a personal relationship with God, and a relationship that is characterized by struggle both on the side of God and on that of the human heart.”<sup>7</sup> While on his deathbed Herbert sent a friend his manuscript of *The Temple*<sup>8</sup>, saying to publish these works only “if he thought they might do good to any dejected poor soul”.<sup>9</sup> And indeed they did, for it was George Herbert's writings which brought Cowper out of the first of many depressions in his life.

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<sup>4</sup> Gilbert Thomas, *William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century* (London: Ivor Nocholson and Watson, Ltd., 1935), pp. 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> A.W. Ward and W. P. Trent, eds., *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*. Cited 12 October 2003 Online: <http://www.bartleby.com/221/0401.html>.

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 146.

<sup>8</sup> *The Temple* 1633 is a compilation of over 150 of George Herbert poems and sonnets. Ian Lancashire, ‘Selected Poetry of George Herbert’, n.p. Cited 11 November 2003. Online: <http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poet159.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Quote by George Herbert: P. Sheldrake, p. 146.

Four years after beginning his career, Cowper was nominated as clerk in the House of Lords. This procedure was a terrifying thought for 32-year-old Cowper. In order to have this position, a public examination was necessary. Mentally processing the horror this would entail, he began to ponder how this public exposure could be avoided. One way of escape which he contemplated was joining a monastery in France. Stemming from this mental anguish, he fell into his second depression; this one more serious than the last and resulting in attempted suicide. On the night before the examination, Cowper stabbed himself in the chest with a pocketknife, only to have the tip break off without doing the damage intended. That same evening he attempted to hang himself using a garter. The garter broke leaving him unconscious on the floor.<sup>10</sup>

He was found and the examination was cancelled. The following months were torture for Cowper as he mentally rehearsed his actions. He convinced himself that in attempting suicide he had committed the unpardonable sin, thus being eternally doomed. During these miserable months of mental self-flagellation, his brother happened upon him once lying in his bedroom in an awful state. Cowper recalls the moment in his journal: "...the first words I spoke to him (and I remember the very expression) was, 'Oh brother, I am damned – damned. Think of eternity, and then think what it is to be damned.'"<sup>11</sup>

Having been discovered by his brother in this shaken and dejected condition, Cowper was taken to St. Albans Insane Asylum in December of 1763. During these months of despondency before and after entering St Albans, Cowper's attention was drawn inward. Introspectively he tried and found himself guilty. However, there were times which Cowper dared to glance outward and upward; times that he did not allow the fears of the future and pain of the past to envelop him.<sup>12</sup> These times were significant in his spiritual development.

One such time occurred during his stay at St. Albans, which extended from six months to eighteen months. This was not due to the seriousness of his mental disease, but to the spiritual transformation of his soul. Arriving at St. Albans, he was put under the care of Dr Nathan Cotton. Despite Cowper's reclusive tendencies, Dr Cotton consistently nurtured him emotionally, physically and spiritually. As an evangelical

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Joeckel, 'Localizing the Problem of Evil: William Cowper and the Poetics of Perspectivalism', n.p. Cited 15 October 2003. Online: <http://www.quodlibet.net/joeckel-evil.shtml>.

<sup>11</sup> James King and Charles Rykamp (eds.), *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), v.1, p.29.

<sup>12</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p. 94.

believer, Dr Cotton shared the hope he had in Christ with Cowper compassionately and frequently.<sup>13</sup>

Six months into his stay, Cowper experienced a spiritual conversion. This was a significant turning point in his life, though as is written later, Cowper still often struggled through bouts of grave depression. However, in good mental health, he chose to stay for the next twelve months at St. Albans with the friendship and spiritual guidance of his beloved Dr Cotton. Approximately twenty years Cowper's senior, Dr Cotton became a spiritual father and mentor to him. This kind of relationship was much needed and began the formation of Cowper's understanding of Christianity and relationship to God.

Upon leaving St. Albans in June of 1765, Cowper moved to Huntingdon to be near his brother, John. Here he met and resided with the Revd Morley Unwin and his wife, Mary. In a letter to his cousin dated March 11, 1767, Cowper writes about the beloved Unwin couple, "To find those I love, clearly and strongly persuaded of evangelical truth, gives me a pleasure superior to any this world can afford me".<sup>14</sup>

After the unfortunate death of Morley Unwin, Cowper continued to live with Mary Unwin, as this friendship was dear to them both. Through Cowper's fits of depression and Mary's illnesses, they interchangeably nursed each other until her death in 1796. When the news of Morley Unwin's death reached the Church of England, the curate came to the home for visitation and counsel – this man was John Newton. A strong friendship developed between Newton and Cowper; so much so that Newton suggested the move that took Mary Unwin and Cowper from Huntingdon to Olney to be under his pastoral care.

Both spiritually and psychologically, it was helpful for Cowper to be able to join Newton in visitation. Newton also asked Cowper to partner him in writing thematic hymns to expound his weekly sermons.<sup>15</sup> This completed work of the Olney Hymnbook was published in 1779 with 282 works from Newton and a contribution of 68 from Cowper.<sup>16</sup> The low number of Cowper's contribution was neither due to a lack of time nor a

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<sup>13</sup> In his sonnet 'Hope', Cowper praises Dr Cotton as "a man whom God has taught,/With all Elijah's dignity of tone,/And all the love of the beloved John". Cited in 'The Complete Works of William Cowper', n.p. Cited 23 October 2003, *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> Author unknown, 'Cowper and Newton Museum: William Cowper', n.p. Cited on 9 October 2003. Online: <http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/cnm/htmlpages/cowperbiog1.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Louis F. Benson, *The Hymnody of the Christian Church* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1956) p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> Some sources vary as to the exact number of hymns written by each.

lack of talent, but because yet another cloud of depression descended upon his sensitive soul.

This next lasting depression was a result of a fatal dream or, better to say a nightmare.<sup>17</sup> Cowper had this dream early in 1773, but it consequently afflicted him for the last 27 years of his life, bringing about mental anxiety and attempted suicides. Throughout Cowper's depression, Newton stood beside him as a faithful friend.

Relationships were significant to Cowper's psychological and spiritual balance. From the age of six, he was left without a personal caretaker. His mother's death and father's absence left him to mature while facing the harshness of the world alone. In Dr Cotton, the Revd and Mrs Unwin and John Newton, Cowper was introduced to the security and joy of healthy loving relationships.

The bond connecting Cowper and these individuals is best understood as a spiritual mentoring relationship. A mentoring relationship is not to be seen as teacher-student or coach-player; nor is mentoring to be defined "in terms of formal roles but in terms of the character of the relationship and the function it serves".<sup>18</sup> Spiritual mentoring is a friendship based on love, thus has no rigid guidelines, and is participated in by all types of people.<sup>19</sup> The mentor, having travelled a little farther on his spiritual journey, encourages, advises and admonishes the other. Though Cowper left his first spiritual mentor Dr Cotton, the steady presence of Mary Unwin and correspondence with John Newton were the spiritual support that carried him through the darker periods of his later life.

In the years before his death in April 1800, Cowper translated the works of Homer and other Greek and French texts while writing poetry of his own. He spent time with the writings of French quietist Madame Jeanne-Marie Guyon (1647-1711).<sup>20</sup> Within the quietistic belief sets, the annihilation of self-will is valued, thus stressing the wickedness within man and the necessity to destroy all 'humanness' to be in true communion with God.<sup>21</sup> Many of Cowper's works are strongly reminiscent of her writings.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This dream was of such an extreme pain to Cowper that he does not explain its contents to anyone nor write specifically about it. He simply expresses the desperate loneliness and sorrow that he felt from it.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel J. Levinson, *The Seasons in a Man's Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1979), p.98.

<sup>19</sup> Edward C. Sellner, *Mentoring: The Ministry of Spiritual Kinship* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2002), p. 180.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 22.

This should not be surprising, for it is in translating that the words and passages are often read many times, rolling the meaning through one's mind for proper understanding of the message of the text. Cowper seemed to agree with his translations and found himself in the words. The influence of these writings could not bring joy, but only a deeper depression as Cowper was made aware yet again of his own awful sinful state.

Cowper finished his own final published work before Christmas of 1799, less than half a year before his death. The poem, 'Castaway', is a sober summary of Cowper's emotional condition in his final days as he likens himself to a sailor swept off his ship and carried helplessly away.

Within Cowper's story there are significant elements which were influential in his spiritual and emotional formation. It seems that the negative are highly out of proportion to the positive. His loss of parental relationship, depressions, the 'fatal dream' and broken love relationship disproportionately compare with the positive influences of his conversion experience and spiritual mentoring relationships.

One's life story and spiritual story cannot be compartmentalised. They ride parallel with each other. The issues of life influence spirituality and spirituality influences life. Going back over Cowper's history the focus will be on the affect of various people and circumstances which were significant in forming his spirituality.

## Influences on Cowper

When exploring the spiritual history of William Cowper, one must take into consideration that he lived during the momentous years of the Evangelical Revival.<sup>23</sup> Thus the potent winds of the evangelical movement did not go unfelt by young Cowper. As a youth, though not yet a follower of Christ, Cowper was grounded in the scriptures and in Puritan authors such as John Bunyan.

Little is known of any particular spiritual and theological influences upon Cowper during his years growing into adulthood. At the age of 21,

<sup>21</sup> Paul T. Crowley, 'Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon', n.p. Cited 5 November 2003. Online: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07092b.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> In her works one can easily find the themes of God's sovereignty and man's depravity. However she went a step further in expecting the pain, though always receiving it in humility. "Smite me, O thou, whom I provoke!/ And I will love thee still:/ The well deserved and righteous stroke/ Shall please me, though it kill." Cited in Madame Jeanne Guyon, *Union With God* (Augusta, Maine: Christian Books, 1981), p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> The Revd John M. Cromarty, 'Grace In Affliction: William Cowper, Poet of Olney', n.p. Cited 14 November 2003. Online: <http://pcea.asn.au/JMC/Content.html>.

Cowper's cousin Martin Madan first directed him to the gospel message of the scriptures when seeking to comfort Cowper during his first serious depression. This seemed to be without any interest or response from Cowper.<sup>24</sup>

To take respite from his troubling depression, Cowper spent several months away by the sea. The splendour of one clear morning brought an end to his depression and could be recognised as the beginning of his personal spiritual awakening. Through the magnificent beauty of the bright morning sun over the sea, Cowper journals: "I felt the weight of all my weariness taken off; my heart became light and joyful in a moment."<sup>25</sup> Cowper experienced God through nature while refreshing his mind through the poetical spiritual writings of George Herbert.

Eleven years later Cowper found himself in another dark valley. This came with his depression in 1763 with the thought of the dreaded parliamentary examination. After his attempted suicides on this occasion, "conviction of sin took place".<sup>26</sup> His mind, soul and body writhed with the guilt of what he had tried to do. He loathed himself for this dreadful act and sensed deep despair and hopelessness; thus feeling subject to the wrath of God. Cowper was in this state for months until in St. Albans Insane Asylum a true heart change took place. This occurred one afternoon when, in the grounds of St. Albans, he found a Bible lying open on a bench. In the gospel of John, chapter 11, Cowper read of Lazarus being raised from the dead and "saw [within Christ's conduct] so much benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy with miserable men". In witnessing the compassion of Christ, Cowper says his heart was "softened, though not yet enlightened".

The 'enlightenment' came not many days following – again through the words of scripture: Romans 3:25: "[Christ] Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (KJV). The words of Cowper in his journal best express the revolution in his heart: "I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel... "<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Karl and Shelagh Thompson, 'The Life of William Cowper', n.p. Cited 22 October 2003. Online: <http://www.netkonect.co.uk/k/ketsvc/cowper.htm>, 22 October 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Gilbert Thomas, *ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

This clearly portrays an understanding and exclamation of the genuine transforming work that Christ had done in his heart. Cowper had seen with the eyes of his soul that though indeed he was a man destined for eternal damnation, salvation was found in Christ.

One witnesses the immediate transforming work of the Holy Spirit through the Word in Cowper's spirit at his conversion. However, evangelicals of the eighteenth century accepted the authenticity of one's conversion only through the test of time.<sup>28</sup> Conversions such as Cowper's (and Newton's for that matter) were seen as the beginning of "something real and profound that has taken root in the life of a convert."<sup>29</sup> It was only living as a follower of Christ after this event that signified the authenticity of that moment.

Perhaps evangelicals of the eighteenth century, when observing Cowper's last years, would at times doubt the validity of his conversion experience. He lived on a roller coaster of emotions which strongly affected his spirituality. In his times of despair Cowper was convinced he was forsaken by God during his final years. However, there were times read within his works that Cowper expresses a genuine love for God. Twelve years after the nightmare of 1773, he wrote his poem 'The Task'.

But, O thou bounteous Giver of all good,  
 Thou art of all thy gifts thyself the crown!  
 Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor;  
 And with the rich, take what thou wilt away.<sup>30</sup>

In this small section of a much larger work, Cowper praises God and confesses Him as the giver and sustainer of life. Cowper affirms his understanding of the Lord as sovereign and a 'crown' of goodness.

One is then brought disturbingly to the concluding decade of Cowper's life. He continued to write during these years, but the writings cannot be compared to the spiritual richness that was present in the hymns and poetry of earlier days.

In Cowper's story one does not read a happy ending. His dejected state of mind in the final years is summarily described in his last poem entitled 'Castaway'. This poem was written regarding an actual event when, in a storm, a sailor had fallen overboard unbeknownst to the crew.<sup>31</sup> The sailor was deserted only to helplessly watch as his sole possibility of

<sup>28</sup> G. Mursell, *ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> William Cowper, 'The Complete Works of William Cowper', n.p. Cited 22 October 2003, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Cited 22 October 2003.

rescue sailed away. Cowper composed this piece, not only to retell the story from this abandoned sailor's perspective, but from his own forsaken soul. The hopelessness and despair which Cowper imagined was in this sailor's mind was harshly present in his own. Below are the last four lines of this work:

When snatched from all effectual aid,  
We perish'd, each alone:  
But I beneath a rougher sea,  
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.<sup>32</sup>

Though the sailor was accidentally swept off the ship, Cowper sees this as an act of God and consequently sees himself as "such a destined wretch". His despair is almost palpable.

Nearly six months after completing this poem, Cowper died. The circumstances around his death do not seem to portray the same man who was so beautifully transformed earlier. His last words were spoken to a young woman who offered him a drink as refreshment. Upon accepting the offer, the aging Cowper melancholically responded "What can it signify?".<sup>33</sup> The next afternoon Cowper died in a sorrowful somber state which enveloped much of his life. Pain and gloom were the first and last chapters to the story of William Cowper.

Depression and loneliness are not found strictly in those who have a history of pain and loss. Depression was known also in the life of Henri Nouwen (1932-1996). As a Catholic priest, Nouwen was a prolific lecturer and author, focusing often on spirituality. In a book compiled through journal writings during his depression he writes, "During my months of anguish, I often wondered if God is real or just a product of my imagination. I now know that while I felt completely abandoned, God didn't leave me alone."<sup>34</sup> This is William Cowper.

To go one step further, depression to some degree is a part of every person's maturation.<sup>35</sup> Though these depressions take different forms and are a result of different stimuli, they are present and are potentially devastating. For Henri Nouwen, his journey out of depression was through

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Cited 22 October 2003.

<sup>33</sup> G. Thomas, *ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>34</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love* (New York: Image Books, 1998), p. 118.

<sup>35</sup> Tim LaHaye, *How to Win Over Depression* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 18. and H. Norman Wright, *The Christian Use of Emotional Power* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1974), p. 75.

the encouragement of friends. Nouwen says that without this support he “could have easily become bitter, resentful, depressed, and suicidal”.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike Nouwen, Cowper did not rise out of his depression to embrace the eventual joy found in Christ; rather he seemed to only hang onto hope by a thin imperceptible thread. Denomination, citizenship, and two hundred years separate these two men. Their commonalities are two-fold: God and depression. The stark difference is how these two men interpret and reflect on both topics. It is because of Cowper’s understanding (or misunderstanding) of God that he did not rise out of his depression as did Nouwen. Delving into his hymn writings one sees a clearer picture as to why Cowper responded the way he did to the depression he faced. Clues are found to his personal theology, thus allowing for an understanding of his spiritual formation.

## Cowper’s Works

Through the hymns published in the Olney Hymnbook, significant parts of Cowper’s theology can be discerned. Though they were originally written to follow the thematic preaching of John Newton, two general themes are threaded through Cowper’s contribution of hymns. The first is the destitute state of humankind; a person as hopeless and helpless with no value. Below are examples of terms Cowper chooses when describing himself or humankind. First is listed the hymn number as found in the Olney Hymnbook, followed with the term(s) used:

V	wretches, feeble worm
XL	rebellious worm
XLI	worm, unworthy of his care
XXXIV	exile
XXXVIII	poor, despised, forgot
LI	grovelling creature
LI	worm
LIII	wretched thorn. <sup>37</sup>

As seen time and again Cowper uses the term ‘worm’; a lower or more dejected life form could not be used. A worm has no honour and no worth. In making this correlation, Cowper identifies humankind as valueless. He sees nothing in a person that deserves the grace of God, nothing in a person that is worthy of the redemptive loving touch of Christ.

<sup>36</sup> H.J.M. Nouwen, *ibid.*, Intro, p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Taken from hymns found in: William Cowper, ‘The Complete Works of William Cowper’, n.p. Cited 22 October 2003, *ibid.*

Cowper's view of humankind comes from his theological understanding of the "total depravity of man" found in Calvinism.<sup>38</sup> This teaching is that a person from birth has no good in him or herself, thus can do nothing to gain merit or acceptance by God, resulting in sole dependence upon God's actions in his or her life for salvation.

The second thematic thread in Cowper's hymns is the providence of God, which also is a foundational belief in Calvinism. This belief states that God is active in creation and has his planned purposes for the ultimate good behind the struggles of the saints.<sup>39</sup> In these few excerpts from the Olney Hymnbook, Cowper's conviction of God's providence is evident:

The saint should never be dismay'd,  
Nor sin in hopeless fear;  
For when they least expect his aid,  
The Saviour will appear.

*II The Lord Will Provide*

What though it pierced my fainting heart,  
I bless thine hand that caused the smart;  
It taught my tears awhile to flow,  
But saved me from eternal woe.

*XXXVI Affliction Sanctified by the Word*

Trials must and will befall;  
But with humble faith to see  
Love inscribed upon them all,  
This is happiness to me.

*XXXV Welcome Cross*

Oh! Let me then at length be taught  
What I am still so slow to learn;  
That God is love, and changes not,  
Nor knows the shadow of a turn.

*XL Peace after a Storm*

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace:  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

*LXVIII Light Shining Out of Darkness<sup>40</sup>*

<sup>38</sup> Hugh T. Kerr, *A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 45.

<sup>39</sup> Donald K. McKim, ed., *Reformed Theology: The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 185.

<sup>40</sup> William Cowper, 'The Complete Works of William Cowper', n.p. Cited 23 October 2003, *ibid.*

Emphasis is not placed on the trials, but on the goodness and mercy of God above them. The ‘smiling face’ of the Almighty is hidden and it is his own ‘hand that caused the smart’, but God’s love and peace are active, if not in this life on earth then to be experienced in eternity.

After identifying these two forerunning themes in Cowper’s hymns, one can now see that these were a large part of the framework for Cowper’s spiritual formation. Concerning the total depravity of humankind, Cowper certainly never once saw himself as deserving the eternal joys of heaven. In fact it was quite the opposite, so much so that even after his conversion experience it was hard for Cowper to accept his value as a child of God. He often was so overwhelmed with his sins that he was not able to see the beauty of the regenerated life in Christ. This vein of thinking troubled him gravely in his last days.

In recognising Cowper’s understanding of God’s providence, one can somewhat reconcile in his or her mind how it is that this melancholic Cowper could have written such wonderful masterpieces of God’s sustenance and mercy. Cowper understood that the circumstances in which he found himself were from God, both the good and the bad. This acceptance did not make him bitter. It is interesting to note that never does one read that Cowper blamed or questioned God. He always looks introspectively. Trials were from God. For Cowper that was a fact not to be disputed. It was his responsibility then to live within these trials as is directed in scripture.

The arduous battle for Cowper was wrestling to reconcile his personal conviction of being betrayed by God to his Calvinistic theology. It was perhaps a misunderstanding or a lack of complete understanding which kept Cowper in this never-ending battle. Apart from the two issues mentioned above there is a third Calvinistic doctrine which perplexed Cowper – the doctrine of election; this position being that in the world there are souls whom God has chosen to be part of His kingdom (the elect), leaving the others in their sinful unredemptive state. This doctrine is hotly disputed. However, when one reads the *Institutes* by John Calvin, his writing on the election of the saints is not meant to be an issue for concern. Calvin states this doctrine as “useful, necessary, and most sweet... it establishes the certainty of salvation, [and] peace of conscience...”<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Cowper interpreted election and other Calvinistic doctrines according to his own feelings and experiences, often leaving him in a place

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<sup>41</sup> Henry Beveridge (trans.), *John Calvin: Institutes of Religion*, n.p. Cited 5 November 2003. Online: <http://www.smartlink.net/~douglas/calvin/>.

of insecurity and spiritual tension. His turmoil theologically and spiritually did not allow his mind to rest peacefully in God's promises to his children (elect or otherwise).

## Storybook vs. Lifestory

Evidently it is not because of Cowper's saintliness that his hymns have lived on in protestant churches through the centuries.<sup>42</sup> If Cowper's story was known, his bust would quickly be removed from the hall of spiritual giants. However, it is not the man who wrote the words that is attractive but the heart which produced them. Cowper's writings are an honest record of his genuine spiritual experience which he expresses in beautiful rhyme.<sup>43</sup> A follower of Christ finds him or herself in the hymns of Cowper. Struggle and triumph, sorrow and joy are a very real presence in the life of one who has committed to follow Christ. Believers know that the Christian life is not always a joyful journey. The sorrow is often too deep to comfort, the burden is too heavy to bear, the pain is too acute to soothe. This is real. This is life. The storybook is shut and reality is recognised.

Nevertheless, there is a final, stable resting place. This peaceful platform is present to all, but the choice must be made to stand upon it. It is hope; hope which is birthed by new life found in Christ. Though this hope was present during Cowper's times of discouragement, it was blanketed by his mental anguish and loneliness. Though Cowper's life ended in despair and wavered between emotional poles, he himself reveals this platform as, "Hope as an anchor, firm and sure, holds fast / The Christian vessel, and defies the blast."<sup>44</sup>

Whether it is described as a platform with stable footing or an anchor with a securely weighted grip, hope for a Christian is dependable, essential and eternal. With this understanding grafted into the complex life of William Cowper, one can confidently conclude his story with 'happily ever after'.

**Vanessa L Lake** is studying for an MTh in Applied Theology at IBTS and serving as a missionary in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia.

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<sup>42</sup> G. Currie Martin, *The Church and The Hymn Writers* (London: J. Clarke, 1928), pp. 179-180.

<sup>43</sup> Louis F. Benson, *The Hymnody of the Christian Church*. (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1956) p. 155.

<sup>44</sup> William Cowper, 'The Complete Works of William Cowper', n.p. Cited 22 October 2003, *ibid*.

## Book Reviews

**Christopher J Ellis**

*Gathering:*

*A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition*

SCM Press, London, United Kingdom, 2004, £19.99

This book is long overdue. Though the author concentrates on British Baptist worship, at last we have a significant book on worship in our baptistic tradition from a non-North American perspective. To read this book is an essential task for every European Baptist pastor who has a concern for the worship life of the congregation she or he cares for. This should become a standard textbook for worship courses in all our European seminaries. The very title indicates Chris Ellis draws on the contemporary theological motif of primary theology arising out of gathering baptistic communities. As such, he empathises closely with themes this journal has often examined.

He explores carefully the idea of worship as theology, a proper starting point within baptistic communities. He examines community spirituality, preaching and singing. He discusses the two gospel sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism and in so doing uncovers attitudes in some of our foreparents we might well have forgotten.

But this reviewer has some criticisms. The book suffers as it is based on a doctoral dissertation and therefore Ellis does not pick up on more recent developments. The section on preaching lacks reference to the important work done by David Brown with students in the EBF on *Transformational Preaching*, or insights to be gained from the book by Ellis's contemporary, Michael J Quicke, in *360 degree preaching*. For this reviewer there is a disappointment at the lack of clear convictions about the Eucharist. The text simply describes the Eucharist as central rather than normative, but no real argument is advanced to defend the current pattern. Ellis limits himself to describing the variety of practice. This contrasts with the clear conviction taken by E. A. Payne and S. F. Winward in an earlier generation and my own comments in the 1999 Whitley Lecture.

Nevertheless, these issues apart, this book is a must. It fills a long-felt need. It will be the worship text book of choice in European Baptist seminaries. The author is to be commended.

**The Revd Keith G Jones**  
Rector, IBTS

**Andrei Ivanovich Savin** (compiler) **A. G. Melnikov** (editor)  
*Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i evangelskie cerkvi Sibiri v 1920-1941 gg.*  
*Dokumenti i materiali*  
Novosibirsk: Posoh, 2004. 426 pages + photographs. ISBN 5-93958-019-X

Anyone who has tried to write about the history of Baptists in an Eastern European or former Soviet Union country knows how difficult this apparently easy task is. One expects the task to be easy, since most continental European Baptist histories span only a hundred, or at most, a hundred and fifty years. The documents, as they are of rather recent origin, must be easily accessible, and in addition there must exist a good number of live witnesses whose memory can be tapped to obtain information about the beginnings and early stages of the object of study.

However, this is not always the case. There are no live eyewitnesses of events of a hundred years ago, and hardly any witnesses of even seventy years ago whose evidence can be taken with absolute confidence. As for written evidence, historical proximity can be misleading: there can be very few primary sources because early Baptists took a lackadaisical attitude towards keeping records of any kind. It is also possible that many documents disappeared over time due to political upheavals in certain historical circumstances, e.g. under Communism.

This publication is a brilliant example of source material in this context. Written in Russian, it focuses geographically on Siberia, and chronologically on the years 1920-1941. Its treatment includes Christian denominations termed 'Evangelical', which can be slightly misleading to a Western reader because, in addition to Baptists and Mennonites, it includes 'Evangelical Christians', Molokans and Seventh-Day Adventists.

In the extensive introduction (75 pages) the author, A. I. Savin, provides a general background for understanding the relationship between the State and Christianity in the time of Communism. This introduction is followed by almost three hundred documents edited and published mostly for the first time anywhere. Documents include Communist party and Soviet state archival materials, military tribunals and courts, and soviet periodicals. They are reproduced chronologically from the earliest date with added brief editorial notes.

The book also offers several useful appendices: biographical information about the main personalities, Christian believers and non-Christian Communist officials, name and geographical indices, explanation of abbreviations and almost a hundred reproductions of photographs from the period.

Here is a wealth of information, which makes it invaluable for any research in Russian and Soviet Christianity of the free-church tradition. However, the significance of this collection transcends its narrow regional and chronological delimitation. It is a splendid model to Eastern/Central European Baptist and other church historians to emulate, or at least to consult as they undertake similar projects.

**Davorin Peterlin**  
Director, The Keston Institute, Oxford

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**Simon Oxley**

*Creative Ecumenical Education*  
WCC Publications, Geneva, 2002

This book is written about ecumenical education, but it is a good guide to everybody who is involved in all the various sides of education. Isn't all learning and good teaching the process of meeting 'the different Other', both in terms of people and circumstances? Doesn't learning often take place 'on the borders' where people and discourse meet?

'Creative' in the title carries the meaning that (ecumenical) education "should be about creating – creating understanding, openness, commitment, engagement and action" (p.5). As creating is always the process, not the end result, where both teachers and learners participate, "a feeling of having 'arrived' is the prelude to disaster" (p.56). Faith is the dynamic concept (p.58).

This is the reason why the author opposes the use of the concept of 'formation', which has the implication that we know the 'end product' of the process. Instead Oxley suggests that we use 'education' as liberative and open-ended, involving both learning and teaching. His analysis made me reflect about the use of the concept in relation to 'spiritual formation'. In the light of the concern expressed in the book, is this phrase appropriate?

Oxley calls us to transformation – not only change – in our ways of thinking about education. We need to help "churches become learning communities rather than domesticating communities" (p.44). In explaining this, the author uses the symbolic language of moving from the 'map reading' and 'travel instructions' approach to the process of 'map making'. In doing that, many creative methodologies with concrete tips are suggested, which can be encompassed in the following key words: student-

centred, participatory, integrative, narrative, contextual, involving self-analyses and critical thinking.

Oxley mentions again and again, that there is no necessary connection between the act of teaching and the act of learning. Teaching might be only a process of transmission, which does not result in the transformation of a person, because the latter never happens outside of the person, though it might be partly initiated by external stimuli such as teaching. Learning happens through doing rather than observing or being instructed. It requires the involvement of the whole person, who is immersed in an educational experience. For successful learning the education process has to begin with the felt, contextual need, with a real question or problem. Otherwise “we end up with someone else’s knowledge and even someone else’s faith rather than our own” (*p.123*). But learning is not only an individual activity. The author is convinced that communities should learn too.

One might ask, reading the book: what is the role of God in this process? Is he the object or subject of the educational process? Is learning only a human initiated activity? I believe that if learning happens, this is the work of God, because “learning is of the essence of faith” (*p.69*) which fills us with “joy and hope because it is based on a conviction that change is possible” (*p.95*). Who else can initiate faith?

**Einike Pilli, MEd**  
Lecturer in Education, IBTS, Prague